

STAFF REPORT

To: City Council PED Committee Date: April 9, 2018

From: Ben Woody, Development Services Department
Chris Collins, Development Services Department

Via: Cathy Ball, City Manager

Subject: Lighting Ordinance Revisions

Summary Statement: Staff is providing background information and an overview of lighting requirements for outdoor string lights, and is requesting preliminary direction on the context and use of these lights as a placemaking tool.

Review: The city's lighting ordinance prohibits suspended strings of lights with individual lamps larger than 15 lumens. The ordinance also prohibits the use of exposed bulbs visible from adjacent properties. The intent of the lighting ordinance is to reduce light pollution, light trespass, glare, and unnecessary light levels and intensity, but not necessarily to prevent the illumination of outdoor seating and gathering areas.

Upon review of a selection of outdoor string lights available for purchase online, staff has been unable to locate fixtures that would be allowed under the 15 lumen limitation currently found in the lighting ordinance. While incandescent bulb string lights may exist under 15 lumens, more efficient LED bulb string lights do not due to the higher lumen output of this type of bulb.

The use of outdoor string lights is commonplace in many cities, including Asheville. Of six cities surveyed at the time of this staff report, none expressly prohibit outdoor string lights. Only one city (Cary) identified string lights specifically, allowing them in two commercial zoning districts.

The reasonable and balanced use of outdoor string lights for placemaking aligns with the 2036 Council Vision by supporting local businesses in their efforts to create a vibrant and Thriving Local Economy.

Pros:

- The use of outdoor string lights can enhance outdoor enjoyment and help foster a vibrant sense of place.

Cons:

- Unregulated outdoor lighting can interfere with nighttime aesthetics and the preservation of the night sky.

Fiscal Impact: The text amendment will be completed by staff and does not require outside resources.

Recommendation: Staff recommends amending the Unified Development Ordinance to reflect current lighting technology while balancing different perspectives on the use of outdoor string lights as a placemaking tool.